

The Writing Center and WAC Program

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To: Rosemary Sutton

From: Mary Murray 

Date: May 31, 2007

Subject: Evaluation of Writing Center and WAC Program

Attached are several reports that evaluate the Writing Center and some documents for evaluating the WAC Program. The Writing Center reports show that our tutors and tutorials are working very well for students. In the nine years that I have been here, our numbers doubled last semester (see attached sheet). When I came, mostly first year students came to the Writing Center; however, after many WAC workshops, more and more students from all disciplines began coming to the Writing Center. This past semester, we had the largest number of graduate students ever attend (122 out of 610 total). Our numbers jumped 17% once we moved into the library the year before last.

Aside from the better location, I believe that the reason for this success is our top value on hospitality. One Writing Center study showed that 95% of students came back to the Writing Center because they were welcomed and not made to feel stupid. Tutors are screened for their hospitality before hiring and are trained to connect with students even very briefly, and this value has paid off especially in a commuter school like ours.

The reports for the Writing Center show some concerns that we need to address:

- giving students more than the ½ hour they now receive
- training tutors in APA format more thoroughly (they are English majors)
- space for a classroom for our English 105/106 workshops.

The evaluation of the WAC Program is underway, but not completed. I have attached an earlier survey (taken 3 years ago) that needs some redesign. Faculty members who responded were pleased with the program, although they found persistent problems with student writing. I had hoped to complete the WAC Program evaluation this year; however, I could not due to many obstacles. I anticipate being finished in another month.

Here are some of the reasons why I am not finished. Every semester I appoint an assistant; this year, my assistant could not help me due to family problems. I lost many tutors this semester—illnesses, quitting, fewer hires. Such volatility meant I had to cover shifts and therefore had less office time. I also tutor the most difficult students (those with serious mental illnesses such as borderline

personality disorder), and these took up a great deal of time this year. Though a joyous time, fall semester I was preparing to get married in December. I also submitted a book manuscript to Cistercian Publications on December 17, 2006, and then had to revise and resubmit it by February 25, 2007—I asked for an extension and did not receive one. Finally, as you know, my condominium had a huge fire; I moved three times this year. I am on the board, so that has meant many meetings. Thankfully, I'm so happy about being married that all the moving hasn't bothered me too much.

I do hope to be finished with the WAC Program evaluation soon, however. I regret very much not finishing it on time and hope your office can wait a month.

I would like to conduct an email survey of WAC faculty, pilot a student survey, and then conduct a student survey. This summer, my tutors are collecting data on the number of students who passed and failed our English 105/106 courses and their graduation rates. That should give some retention information.

Any suggestions regarding the design of the WAC Program evaluation is welcome; I did consult other schools' reports, but feel that my initial survey is lacking the kind of direction I would like the faculty to give me. Any suggestions about evaluating the Writing Center are welcome as well.

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To: Rosemary Sutton
From: Mary Murray
Date: June 28, 2007
Subject: WAC and Writing Center Evaluations

Here are the reports I promised last month. There are three of them plus a set of student evaluations of my workshops:

- * Survey of WAC Faculty Members
- * Survey of Students in WAC Courses
- * Data on English 105/106 Graduation Rates from 1999 through 2003
- * Student Feedback on WAC Workshops

I've included the data sets and will be sending you the SPSS file; if you have an assistant, I would love to have my work checked as it has been many years since I've done statistical analyses (which I enjoy, but still).

Summary

Considering the data on English 105/106 and the faculty and student WAC surveys, here are some conclusions I've reached:

1. Students who take English 105/106 and have a good point average graduated. That means that our course benefits students who have a good point average—in the future, with the new 2.3 GPA requirement, the Writing Center courses should prove helpful to students.

- * the correlation between students who graduated from CSU and having taken English 105/106 was good ($r=.508$).
- * the correlation between GPA and students who took our course(s) and graduated was good ($r=.445$).
- * the graduation rate correlated with the passing of English 105/106 is small but significant ($r=.300$).
- * English 105/106 did not favor one gender over the other ($r=-0.004$).

2. Faculty members who teach WAC were pleased as a whole with the Writing Center services, WAC support (i.e. student writing workshops, WAC web materials, consultations with Director), and the plagiarism service (turnitin.com). Individually, they reported several things they were concerned about:

- * inconsistency in tutors
- * not knowing about the plagiarism service
- * no knowledge of how many students use the Writing Center
- * tutors need to know APA better
- * the 2,000 word limit is not enough

3. Students who were surveyed about their WAC experience were pleased overall about the value of a WAC course. They were also pleased about the writing workshops that they have had. Students voiced concern about the following:

- * writing assignments fashioned to fit the word count guidelines

Actions to Be Taken

From these studies, here are some actions I will be putting into place:

1. Set aside several afternoons and Fridays for longer appointments (our busiest times, Mondays and Wednesdays, I would like to keep at ½ hour appointments).
2. Create a checklist for tutors regarding what has to be covered in order to improve consistency.
3. Work with tutors on APA formatting and on explaining grammatical errors.
4. Ask Gen Ed Implementation Committee to consider revising the WAC word count guidelines.
5. Figure out how to give faculty feedback about students who attend the Writing Center.
6. I think I need to develop more materials for WAC workshops and for the Writing Center on style. CSU students are lacking in this area through lack of reading.

Conclusion

Any advice about improving our services is welcome.